



Juliette Hueber and Antonio Mendes da Silva (ed.)

## Keys for architectural history research in the digital era Handbook

Publications de l'Institut national d'histoire de l'art

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# Introduction

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DOI: 10.4000/books.inha.4930

Publisher: Publications de l'Institut national d'histoire de l'art

Place of publication: Publications de l'Institut national d'histoire de l'art

Year of publication: 2014

Published on OpenEdition Books: 5 December 2017

Serie: Actes de colloques

Electronic ISBN: 9782917902592



<http://books.openedition.org>

### Electronic reference

SILVA, Antonio Mendes da. *Introduction* In: *Keys for architectural history research in the digital era: Handbook* [online]. Paris: Publications de l'Institut national d'histoire de l'art, 2014 (generated 18 décembre 2020). Available on the Internet: <<http://books.openedition.org/inha/4930>>. ISBN: 9782917902592. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.inha.4930>.

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This text was automatically generated on 18 December 2020.

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# Introduction

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- 1 This handbook gathers a selection of texts by the speakers at the Training School “Architectural Research in the Digital Era” (Ghent, 2-6 April 2013) and the workshop “GIS, data visualization an open community” (Paris, 27-28 January 2014). The aims of these two events organised in the framework of the COST ISO904 Action *European architecture beyond Europe: Sharing Research and Knowledge on Dissemination Processes, Historical Data and Material Legacy (19th-20th centuries)*, was to familiarize the participants, architectural historians with a variety of aspects related to conducting research in a digital era: Architectural history research in the digital era Copyrights; Standards, metadata, interoperability and sustainability; Data visualisation; Creating a digital research environment, GIS and Open communities.
- 2 These texts offer complementary accounts of contemporary research processes in the context of digital Humanities. Lisa Spiro first presents a general panorama of current academic research from the standpoint of modulations produced by new digital technologies. In parallel, Kenneth Crews tackles the essential questions of copyright and royalties in the circulation of results from research. Then Christophe Leclercq and Paul Girard on the one hand and the team around Ian Gregory on the other, present results of research programmes made possible by digital procedures and tools. Finally, Julien Dorra shows other ways of doing and producing together through Open communities in particular thanks to the internet and social networks.
- 3 These texts all together point definitively the question of digital training and culture of historians made essential in the context of many research programmes today and which often imply information technology development. Indeed, although information technology techniques have radically changed the research landscape, it remains that that the design of a model of relevant data relies on knowledge of the period being considered by the student and her analysis of the sources. The solution does not appear to be located in the invention of a hypothetical historian-programmer, but in the development of new forms of close collaboration between researchers, engineers and program developers.

## Lisa Spiro: The Impact of Digital Humanities on academic research

- 4 The invention of the web during the 1990s transformed ways of being, doing and living in society, also profoundly changing academic practices both from the point of view of tools and methods, but also of disciplines.
- 5 Lisa Spiro analyses three forms of changes brought about by the digital revolution:
  - unprecedented access to online electronic resources for researchers such as the full text of journal articles,
  - the invention of new methods for exploring large and small bodies of data,
  - the impetus of a new dynamic in scholarly communication.
- 6 Projects such as Transcribing Bentham, which is a public collaborative project to transcribe the writings of the English philosopher, launched in 2010-2011, brings into perspective the possibilities for reinvention of scholarly research through the development of new technologies. Other examples of tools that today have been adopted broadly such as Zotero also show the development of practices in the treatment of sources or the analysis of texts. Digital transformation, which is not systematic, of research sources also allows infinitely greater facility in the treatment of large and small corpora.
- 7 The Mapping the Republic of Letters project, which received funding in the first Digging into Data competition, is an excellent example. Bringing together collaborators at Stanford University, the University of Oklahoma and Oxford University, this project examines the correspondence network through which ideas circulated during the Enlightenment. Intellectuals such as Voltaire, John Locke, Benjamin Franklin and many others participated in rich exchanges of letters, providing what principal researcher Dan Edelstein calls an early form of peer review. This exchange is documented by the Electronic Enlightenment project, which provided Mapping the Republic of Letters with access to metadata for about 50,000 letters.
- 8 This project allows motives for networks to be visualized through time which would never have been possible within the limits of classical research, and consequently opens the field to other types of questioning of research data to the development of other hypotheses and to other interpretations.
- 9 The Digital Humanities do not only process large corpora of data. They can also enlighten small corpora in a totally new way, such as for example the letters of the American cartographer Jedediah Hotchkiss's correspondence with his daughter in which he describes and maps the Battle of Fredericksburg during the US Civil War. This corpus was treated with Neatline, a group of digital tools developed by the Scholars' Lab at the University of Virginia Library, allowing historical narratives to be built from cartographies and timelines.
- 10 Finally, Lisa Spiro describes the positive impact of digital humanities on the traditional forms of scholarly communication, in particular on evaluation processes. For example, a study shows that 55% of the books in the Cornell Library acquired after 1990 have never been borrowed. In contrast, online forms of dissemination of scientific literature accelerate the circulation of ideas and touch an infinitely more vast public with which authors initiate broader forms of scholarly conversation that overturn the traditional forms of peer assessment.

- 11 There are now a large number of ways of disseminating ideas on the web (websites, blogs, online journals), although they still suffer from a lack of confidence and scholarly legitimacy. They still retain all the characteristics of traditional methods of scholarly production in terms of rigour and scholarly requirements while adding on collaborative and interdisciplinary components.

## Kenneth D. Crews and Questions of copyright and royalties

- 12 The major obstacle to making the results of research available and the dissemination of digital resources is the question of copyright. This issue is especially sensitive in the area of art and architectural history whose objects of study are to a great extent visual corpora. It is therefore essential for researchers and all the producers of data in general to have clear knowledge of what it is possible to do.
- 13 Kenneth D. Crews proposes an analysis of museums' policies relating to images of their works of art, reviewing the legitimate claims but also protective positions that are unjustifiable from a legal point of view. This contribution is placed mainly from the point of view of American law and policies adopted by the great American museum institutions.
- 14 The Copyright Act in the USA, like copyright in many other countries, introduces exceptions to copyright that have major implications in the context of the reproduction of heritage objects. The notion of "Fair Use" in the USA or the educational exception in France (Fair use and some exceptions related to education and research can apply to artworks) are applicable to works of art. On the other hand, protection by copyright has by necessity limited scope in time. Due to this, works that are in the public domain no longer benefit from the protections of copyright although moral law continues to apply for artists. However, the understanding of the implications of protection by copyright quickly becomes more complex when we refer for example to the situation of professional photographers, in particular those who photograph art works. The notion of originality underlies the decision of Judge Bridgeman in the USA relating to the protection of works of reproduction.
- 15 Another example that can be tricky to assess is that of the rights an artwork's owner, especially when the owner is a museum. Kenneth Crews shows that very often, museums go beyond the legal framework of copyright protection in implementing arbitrary rules for the use of reproductions of works and in controlling access to the original work.
- 16 If in most cases, the implementation of these barriers in museums can be explained and understood, the consequences can be catastrophic for academic research. And this all the more so that a researcher's work often requires the publication of reproductions from multiple sources that can be subject to different rules. Kenneth Crews thus compares the different positions adopted by major American institutions such as The Museum of Fine Art Boston, The Guggenheim Museum, The Georgia Museum of Art, The Carnegie Museum of Art, to cite only a few. In conclusion, K. Crews shows that although globally institutional positions are now widely open to criticism, from a legal point of view some have nevertheless adopted a course of action that goes towards openness and the dissemination of objects. This is the case of the Guggenheim for

example. At a time when visual communication has never been so important, it therefore calls for a re-evaluation of public policies and the reformation of reproduction rules introduced by museums.

## **Christophe Leclercq and Paul Girard: Experiments in Art and Technology Datascape**

- 17 Christophe Leclercq and Paul Girard present the results obtained from the electronic processing of the archives of The Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.), the association created in 1966 in the USA by the artists Robert Rauschenberg and Robert Whitman. The association's aim was to create synergy between artists, engineers and scientists for the creation of works that went beyond the strict limits of the artistic sphere. The complexity of the productions arising from the association's activity in all its facets, touching on aesthetics and the history of art, as well as social history, requires specific processing methods for the archives.
- 18 The "archival documents" include the following formats and types: correspondence; letters, manuscripts, lists; inventories, files, budgets; finance documents, grant applications, programs, advertisement documents, invitation cards, press kits, press releases, communiqués; memos, speeches, reports; memoranda, bibliographies, essays. Also featured are "published text documents": books, text in books, issues of periodicals, text in periodicals, proceedings, theses, solo exhibition catalogues, group exhibition catalogues. Lastly, there are video documents (interviews, documentaries/reports), audio documents (interviews), visual documents (photographs, and the like), and digital documents (CD-ROMs, etc.).
- 19 As regards the work and projects from the association, the authors present the processing of sources developed on the one hand by the Daniel Langlois Foundation and on the other by one of the principal members of the E.A.T., Billy Klüver.
- 20 Regarding the exploration of the archives, the authors have developed a digital treatment method, a "datascape" to analyse data from these specific archives, following a continuous iterative process of exploration and modelling that preserves the initial complexity of the data. The aim is to allow the generation of data visualizations in the form of graphs, diagrams, timelines, maps, etc. from the concepts retained that are the participants, temporal sequences, places and the sources. The concept of "datascape" allows the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the data to be reconciled.

## **Ian Gregory, Alistair Baron, David Cooper, Andrew Hardie, Patricia Murrieta-Flores, Paul Rayson: Crossing Boundaries: Using GIS in Literary Studies, History and Beyond**

- 21 In the context of the increasingly widespread use of geographical information systems in the humanities and social sciences, the authors analyse several questions relating to this recent use compared to the nature of the data that can be manipulated by GIS (and following which model) and compared to the relevance of the results of research

carried out in this way. This analysis relies on examples from studies of textual corpora.

- 22 The first example is based on descriptions of the voyages of Thomas Gray in 1769 and of Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1802 around the English Lake District. These are short descriptions, each of less than 10,000 words, analysed in the context of the “Mapping the Lakes” project (Gregory & Cooper, 2009; Cooper & Gregory, 2011). After identifying all the geographical terms, XML processing (including disambiguation and processing of variants) and georeferencing, the authors produced cartographical visualizations of the two travellers’ itineraries, assessed their preferences with respect to the types of places through which they travelled, the sites where they stayed, valleys, altitude... finally these preferences were linked to the English Picturesque for Gray and the Romantic movement for Coleridge. This example shows that it is possible to create a geographical information system from literary texts and the geographical explorations within these texts give results that can be truly innovative for research.
- 23 The second example presented by the authors relates to a very large text corpus of some 2.5 million words from the reports of the Registrar General from 1851 to 1911 for England and Wales. The authors used analysis techniques of the place names mentioned in the reports that had been georeferenced beforehand. Their aim was to analyse which places are mentioned and what the text says about them. Several automatic searching techniques were used such as “concordance” (the word is indicated with the citation of the passage in which it appears) and “collocation” (frequency of appearance of other words around the searched term). A search on infant mortality at that time shows for example that measles was the most important factor and furthermore allows the geographical zones which were most affected to be visualized.

## Julien Dorra and the question of open communities

- 24 Under the title, “Building an open community: a new opportunity for scholarly projects”, Julien Dorra presents in this final contribution, the wonderful possibilities for collaborative work provoked by the internet, the web and social networks through the experience of Open Communities. The major experience, and probably one of the most original ones among those which were presented is Museomix, the launch of which in 2011 the author contributed to and where people from a diverse set of skills and talents gather in a museum, and prototype new ways of experiencing museums in 3 days using a wide range of tools and technologies. Museomix is an “open invitation to build together”. In the wake of this, other forms of open communities are presented in a variety of registers from contribution to collective knowledge and on different scales: Wikipedia and OpenStreetMap, but also communities from the world of developers and open source such as Drupal and Linux. For those who wish to engage in the experience of mounting projects around the constitution of a community, this contribution from Julien Dorra provides precious feedback on what works and what does not, on pitfalls to be avoided and on ways forward. Finally, the author shows that the idea of mounting a project based on building a community therefore comes today to broaden the field of possibilities even in the context of traditional forms of production of academic knowledge.

- 25 Digital humanities within their general meaning of transdiscipline “carrier of methods, of systems and of heuristic perspectives connected to the digital in the humanities and social sciences”<sup>1</sup> seem to have renewed the conditions of knowledge production and circulation in a novel manner. This does not go smoothly or without a variety of difficulties. But the landscapes that they are drawing today, as we can see in all the studies gathered here, is especially rich and burgeoning.
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## NOTES

1. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital\\_humanities](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_humanities). Accessed March 25, 2014.
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